

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SCS-03
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O 191218Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0461

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D D N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GABORONE 1926

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS PINT RH

SUBJ: AMCIT MERCENARY VIEWS SITUATION IN RHODESIA

REF: (A) GABORONE 1876, (B) GABORONE 1879

1. SUMMARY: PRIOR TO HIS REPATRIATION, AMCIT MERCENARY RICHARD KEITH HENDERSON DISCUSSED WITH EMBOFF HIS RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND SIX MONTHS SERVICE WITH RHODESIAN ARMY. HENDERSON STATED THAT, ALTHOUGH RHODESIAN SUPPLIES OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION ARE ADEQUATE, MORALE IS LOW AND DESERTION RATE IS HIGH. HE ESTIMATED THAT 500 AMERICAN CITIZENS ARE NOW SERVING WITH RHODESIAN FORCES AND THAT MANY ARE NOW SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING DESERTION. RHODESIAN ARMY GRAPEVINE HAS IT THAT MILITARY COMMANDERS MAY INTERVENE IN POLITICS IF SMITH IS DEFEATED BY RAP IN COMING ELECTION. IT IS ALSO RUMORED ARMY HAS PREPARED "SCORCHED EARTH" PLAN TO DESTROY IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF RHODESIAN ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE RATHER THAN TURN THEM OVER TO MAJORITY RULE GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED BY PATRIOTIC FRONT. END SUMMARY.

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2. RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING. ACCORDING TO HENDERSON, HIS RECRUITMENT AS A MERCENARY BEGAN WITH RADIO ADVERTISEMENT HE HEARD IN GAINESVILLE, TEXAS. IN RESPONSE, HE WROTE "SOLDIER OF FORTUNE" MAGAZINE WHICH IN TURN PUT HIM IN TOUCH WITH MAJOR N. LAMPRECHT OF THE RHODESIAN ARMY IN SALISBURY. LAMPRECHT SENT HENDERSON A LETTER (COPY POUCHED AF/S) OFFERING HIM APPOINTMENT

AS "SINGLE TROOPER IN THE RHODESIAN CORPS OF INFANTRY" AT STARTING ANNUAL SALARY OF RHODESIAN \$2,529.00 (ABOUT US\$3,000) AND OFFERED TO REIMBURSE HIS TRAVEL EXPENSES.

3. UPON ARRIVAL IN RHODESIA, HENDERSON UNDERWENT BASIC TRAINING WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS TAME COMPARED WITH HIS TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE WITH US 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION IN KOREA (HE SERVED WITH 637TH ARTY AT OIJAMBU). HIS INITIAL ASSIGNMENT WAS TO C SQUADRON, SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS AIRBORNE UNIT TASKED WITH DEEP PENETRATION RAIDS AGAINST GUERILLA BASES, PARTICULARLY IN MOZAMBIQUE. AFTER ONLY ONE MONTH WITH THIS ELITE UNIT, HENDERSON WAS TRANSFERRED TO REGULAR LIGHT INFANTRY UNIT WHERE HE SPENT REMAINDER OF HIS SIX MONTHS IN RHODESIA.

4. PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT. HENDERSON'S COMPANY OF APPROXIMATELY 150 SOLDIERS WAS REPORTEDLY ALL WHITE, ALTHOUGH IT CARRIED OUT COMBINED OPERATIONS WITH INTEGRATED UNITS. HENDERSON REPORTED RUMORS THAT HIS UNIT WILL SOON BECOME INTEGRATED DOWN TO THE STICK LEVEL (GROUP OF FOUR INFANTRYMEN WHICH IS SMALLEST TACTICAL UNIT OF RHODESIAN ARMY). HENDERSON SAID HIS UNIT WAS WELL SUPPLIED WITH BASIC INFANTRY WEAPONS AND HEAVIER HARDWARE, SUCH AS NEW U.S.-MADE 81MM MORTARS AND 106MM RECOILLESS RIFLES. AMMUNITION SUPPLIES WERE REPORTEDLY ADEQUATE, ALTHOUGH INFANTRYMEN WERE TOLD TO AVOID AUTOMATIC FIRE AND TO CONTROL AMMO CONSUMPTION. HENDERSON CLAIMED THAT HIS UNIT USED U.S.-

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MADE HAND GRENADES AND THAT HE SAW CRATES CONTAINING NEW WEAPONS WHICH WERE MARKED AS HAVING ORIGINATED FROM U.S. PRIVATE ARMS DEALERS.

5. RHODESIAN ARMY OPERATIONS. A TYPICAL RHODESIAN OPERATION WOULD BEGIN WITH LOCAL MILITIA FORCES CONTACT WITH GUERILLAS. LIGHT INFANTRY BROUGHT IN BY HELICOPTERS OR AIRBORNE TROOPS PARACHUTING FROM DAKOTA TRANSPORT PLANES WOULD THEN SERVE AS PRIMARY STRIKE FORCE. HENDERSON STATED THAT HE PERSONALLY TOOK PART IN ONLY THREE SUCH OPERATIONS DURING SIX MONTHS IN RHODESIA. IN TWO OF THESE OPERATIONS, HIS UNIT TOOK ON GUERILLA GROUPS OF TEN MEN EACH; THE GUERILLA GROUP IN THE THIRD CASE CONSISTED OF 30 FIGHTERS. IN ALL THREE ATTACKS, WELL ARMED GUERILLAS STOOD AND FOUGHT FOR APPROXIMATELY 30 MINUTES BEFORE DISPERSING TO ESCAPE AND REGROUP LATER. ACCORDING TO HENDERSON, RHODESIAN ARMY TROOPS OFTEN USED STRONGARM METHODS TO "BEAT" INFORMATION OUT OF VILLAGERS, ALTHOUGH ARMY COMMAND HAS NOW DIRECTED THAT THESE PRACTICES BE DISCONTINUED IN A BELATED EFFORT TO WIN THE "HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE PEOPLE".

6. FOREIGNERS IN RHODESIAN ARMY. THERE ARE NUMEROUS FOREIGNERS FROM MANY COUNTRIES IN RHODESIAN FORCES BUT THEY ARE DISPERSED

IN REGULAR UNITS, ACCORDING TO HENDERSON. BASED ON HIS OWN OBSERVATIONS, HENDERSON ESTIMATED THAT 500 AMERICANS ARE NOW SERVING WITH RHODESIAN FORCES. MANY FOREIGN TROOPS ARE REPORTEDLY DESERTING BECAUSE THEIR DREAMS OF GLORY AND EASY MONEY ARE NOT REALIZED AND BECAUSE WAR IS GOING BADLY FOR RHODESIAN ARMY.

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7. MORALE. ACCORDING TO HENDERSON, MORALE IN RHODESIAN ARMY IS PLUNGING FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. ANIMOSITY IS REPORTEDLY HIGH BETWEEN RHODESIANS AND FOREIGNERS, PRIMARILY BECAUSE RHODESIANS RESENT HAVING TO CALL ON FOREIGNERS TO HELP THEM FIGHT THEIR GUERILLA WAR. REPORTED REDUCTION OF GUERILLA/RHODESIAN FORCES ILL RATE FROM 12/1 TO 2/1 HAS CONVINCED MANY SOLDIERS OF ALL RANKS THAT WAR CANNOT BE WON. DESERTION RATE OF WHITES AND FOREIGNERS IS HIGH, BUT BLACK SOLDIERS RARELY DESERT BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO PLACE TO GO.

8. RUMOR MILL. ALL ARMIES ARE FERTILE GROUND FOR RUMORS, AND THE RHODESIAN DEFENSE FORCE IS NO EXCEPTION. ACCORDING TO HENDERSON, RUMOR CIRCULATING AMONG RHODESIAN SOLDIERS HAS IT THAT, IF RHODESIAN ACTION PARTY BEATS SMITH IN COMING ELECTION, ARMY LEADERS MAY WELL STAGE "MILITARY COUP". PURPOSE OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS WOULD PRESUMABLY BE TO HEAD OFF IMPLEMENTATION OF RAP HARD-LINE POLICIES WHICH WOULD MAKE ARMY'S ALREADY UNWINNABLE, ANTI-GUERILLA FIGHT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT. ACCORDING TO ARMY GRAPEVINE, RHODESIAN FORCES HAVE STANDING

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ORDERS TO CARRY OUT "SCORCHED EARTH" POLICY THROUGHOUT RHODESIA RATHER THAN HAND OVER COUNTRY TO GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED BY PATRIOTIC FRONT GUERRILLAS.

9. COMMENT: HENDERSON IS VERY YOUNG AND VERY SCARED "MERCENARY" WHO HAD ONLY LOW-LEVEL VIEW OF RHODESIAN MILITARY EFFORT. NEVERTHELESS, MANY OF HIS STATEMENTS HAVE RING OF TRUTH, AND WE BELIEVE THAT HE WAS GRATEFUL ENOUGH FOR HIS REPATRIATION TO RECOUNT HIS EXPERIENCES ACCURATELY. IN THIS REGARD, HIS STATEMENTS ABOUT PRESENCE OF 500 AMCITS IN RHODESIAN FORCES AND DELIVERY OF U.S.-MADE WEAPONS OBTAINED FROM PRIVATE ARMS DEALERS ARE DISTURBING. HIS ESTIMATE OF NUMBER OF U.S. MERCENARIES IS HIGHEST WE HAVE HEARD AND, IF EVEN REMOTELY TRUE, EMBASSY CAN EXPECT MORE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE PROTECTION CASES AS THESE "DOGS OF WAR" BEGIN TO TURN UP MORE FREQUENTLY IN BOTSWANA.

10. IF HENDERSON'S STATEMENTS ABOUT POLITICAL LEANINGS OF RHODESIAN FORCES ARE CORRECT, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT EITHER RAP ELECTORAL VICTORY OR POPULAR FRONT SEIZURE OF POWER WOULD CREATE PROSPECT OF INTERVENTION BY RHODESIAN FORCES. THIS WOULD PLACE ARMY BEHIND SMITH ONLY AS LONG AS HE CAN DEMONSTRATE PROGRESS TOWARD ARRANGING AN INTERNAL SOLUTION WITH "MODERATE" BLACKS TO END WAR. HENDERSON SUGGESTED THAT RHODESIAN FORCES WOULD REJECT ANY POLITICAL OR MILITARY ROLE FOR POPULAR FRONT; WE SUSPECT REAL CONCERN OF RHODESIAN BRASS IS TO AVOID BOTH INTERMINABLE WAR AND INTEGRATION OF PF "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" INTO EXITING RHODESIAN ARMY. IF INTEGRITY AND UNITY OF ARMY COULD BE THUS MAINTAINED, RHODESIAN HIGH COMMAND MAY BELIEVE THAT ARMY COULD RETAIN SOME INDEPENDENT INFLUENCE OVER PACE AND DIRECTION FO CHANGE IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE.

11. HENDERSON'S ACCOUNT, WHICH SOMEWHAT TARNISHES POPULAR IMAGE OF RHODESIAN ARMY AS FIRST-RATE FIGHTING FORCE, UNDERLINES
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URGENCY OF EARLY SETTLEMENT IF ARMY IS TO PRESERVE ITS POLITICAL CLOUT. ALTHOUGH SUPPLIES OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION APPEAR TO BE ADEQUATE, HIGH DESERTION RATES ATTEST TO SIGNIFICANT, AND POSSIBLY IRREVERSIBLE, DECLINE. RHODESIAN FORCES CLEARLY REMAIN CAPABLE OF EFFECTIVE SMALL UNIT OPERATIONS AND TACTICAL INNOVATIONS WHICH COULD TEMPORARILY HOLD OFF RISING GUERRILLA TIDE. HOWEVER, CIRCULATION OF RUMORS OF "MILITARY COUPS" AND "SCORCHED EARTH" POLICIES ARE INDICATIVE OF AN ARMY ON THE ROPES.

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